

## Perception of the role of culture in the development of small cities by local governments in the context of strategic documents – a case study of Poland

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**Abstract.** It is widely accepted that the cultural sector and the creative sector have an impact on the socio-economic revival of cities. They create urban images, form a specific creative milieu, generate new jobs, and organize urban space. The above-mentioned observations have been mainly referred to the largest cities. So far, small cities have not been the subject of similar considerations.

As many studies have shown in recent years, the potential of culture for socio-economic development in small cities has been noticed more and more often. It refers mainly to countries in Western Europe or in North America where generally, in the 1980s, the cultural sector was perceived as a remedy for the problems of post-industrial cities. This paper discusses the role of culture in the development of small cities in Poland, i.e. in a country in which only after 1989 is it possible to consider local development managed by local communities. The paper aims at showing how local governments of small cities in Poland perceive the role of culture in their development. The study is based on the analysis of strategic documents dedicated to the development of individual cities. When analysed, strategic documents clearly indicate that local authorities in every city use and are planning to further use different types of cultural activities for the enhancement or development of selected elements included in the broadly-understood socio-economic development; however, only few small cities notice the wide array of opportunities for making the cultural sector a base for socio-economic development.

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## 1. Introduction

In the global approach, cities have been facing multiple problems related to economic transitions since the 1970s, primarily involving industry restructuring. Many Western cities began to look to the cultural sector as a remedy for their problems and an opportunity for development. They tried to use it as a tool for revitalising post-industrial areas and facilities, attracting capital or creating a city new image (James et al., 2006). These actions were successful primarily in large urban centres (Florida, 2002; Currid, 2006; Waitt, 2006; Strykiewicz, 2008, 2009, 2010; Namyslak 2010; Zheng, 2011) where broadly-understood cultural activities were indicated as having a potential: (a) to generate social involvement, build identity and a sense of belonging to the place of residence, (b) to create an attractive place to live or invest, (c) to increase tourist attractiveness, (d) to develop cultural industries with a direct impact on economic growth (new workplaces, increased income), (e) to create the city's image and identity (promotion, branding).

At the same time, smaller cities, experiencing the winding down of companies related to industry which had often been fundamental in the functioning of a given city, did not participate in this type of transformations due to their size and characteristics. Small cities are still looking for answers to many problems which they have to tackle. This particularly concerns cities in Poland and, more generally, Central and Eastern Europe because of the socio-economic changes related to the post-1989 transformation. What is more, small cities in Poland are currently losing more and more higher-order functions to higher-level centres (regional or supra-regional) (Heffner, 2010). Nevertheless, small cities are increasingly following in the steps of larger centres in recognising that broadly-understood culture may be a tool to improve their economic,

social or demographic standing, as emphasised in research conducted by e.g. Bell, Jayne, 2009; Karwińska, 2010; van Heur, 2013; Brennan-Horley, 2013; Środa-Murawska, Biegańska, 2014.

This trend is surely driven by the fact that, in general, small cities are more and more often seen as attractive places to live. Karwińska (2009) underlines the fact that it is noticeable that the appeal of small cities as places to live has been on the rise in recent years. This phenomenon has become visible across Europe and has persuaded authorities to look for new development bases (including the cultural and creative industries) through the smallest centres. These deliberations are tightly related to the tendencies concerning social life changes: (a) the rebirth of a need for local cultural identity, (b) abandoning the rhythm of large cities in favour of the Cittaslow movement, (c) new life patterns related to the gradual acceptance of covering large distances to commute, (d) the advent of new technologies and new modes of work (e-work).

This study, which is a part of the project entitled "Culture-led development of small cities in Poland" aims at showing how local governments of small cities in Poland perceive the role of culture in their development on the basis of an analysis of strategic documents. This stage of the project was directed at determining:

- whether authorities in small cities see opportunities for socio-economic development on the basis of the cultural sector;
- at what levels, if any, they recognise culture's potential for the development of the city.

## 2. The functioning of the cultural sector in Poland at commune level

The implementation of culture as a tool for the development of a city is a complex process. The first

stage should include developing a multiannual city development strategy indicating the main directions for cultural development for the coming years. Therefore this stage of the project has been devoted to analysing development strategies of the analysed cities.

The definition and meaning of local development have been subject to many studies (e.g. Feltynowski, 2015) and it is generally understood as a “long-term process of intentional changes leading to the improvement of the existing state” (Wołowicz, Reśko, 2012: 62). Planning documents are a pivotal instrument of that process. In the case of Polish communes, such documents include: local development strategies and plans, SME support programmes, studies of conditions and directions of spatial development, local zoning plans (Tomanek, 2006).

Among them, commune development strategies are particularly valuable for the purpose of determining actions planned by a commune in terms of the most important objectives of its socio-economic development. However, it should be emphasised that commune development strategies in Poland are not compulsory, no act of law provides for this type of documents. Such possibility may be inferred from Art. 18(2)(6) of the Act on Commune Self-Government (Dz.U. No 142 item 1591, as amended) which states that the commune council (a commune in Poland is a third-order administrative unit, whose sub-types include: municipalities covering the area within the administrative borders of a city; urban-rural communes comprising a city and several villages; rural communes, which do not include any city within their territory) may adopt economic programs or development programmes. This means that there are no guidelines regarding the form of such strategies and thus cultural matters do not have to be included in them.

In terms of direct action planning and the development of culture itself, a culture development strategy may be the most important document. It helps determine in greater detail the role and significance of culture for a given city. Again, the problem is that Polish cities are not obliged to have such a strategy. It is telling that among 100 largest Polish cities, only 19 had such a document (Celiński et al., 2016).

When analysing the perception of the role played by the cultural sector in socio-economic develop-

ment as described strategic documents of local administrative units, it should primarily be underlined that in Poland direct responsibility of local governments for the development of culture began only after the year 1989. In turn, the shape and components of current cultural infrastructure, comprising e.g. cultural centres, community centres, libraries, cinemas, etc., were mostly formed before 1989.

The system transformation and the related decentralisation of planning decisions and actions had an effect also on the cultural sector. The changes it experienced mainly referred to the following three objectives: (a) the introduction of mechanisms promoting reasonable, effective and just management of public funds (in particular in the sector of subsidised cultural activity), (b) a change in the scope of competence of state administration in the context of organising and funding culture, (c) new solutions regarding the management, organisation and funding of cultural institutions (Głowacki et al., 2009: 17). The last objective was related to the process of decentralising the administration of cultural institutions, increasing the autonomy of cultural institutions, drafting legal acts regarding sponsoring or patronage in the field of culture, and including private entities in the performance of tasks in the field of art and culture.

The most important statute that established the responsibility of local governments in the scope of culture, among other fields, is the Act on Commune Self-Government of 8 March 1990. The Act defined the scope of competence and responsibilities of commune local governments. It indicated that culture, and within it the operation of communal libraries and other institutions of culture, is a commune's own task. However, only in 1991 did the Act on Organising and Conducting Cultural Activities of 25 October 1991 stipulate that conducting cultural activities is an obligatory task of a commune. The Act determines the organisational forms of cultural activities, such as theatres, operas, philharmonics, cinemas, museums, libraries, cultural centres, art centres, art galleries, etc. Another important statute entered into force on 1 January 1999. The Act on the Introduction of a Basic Three-Tier Administrative Division of the State of 24 July 1998 introduced local self-government at three levels: the commune (Administrative region of the 3<sup>rd</sup> order in Poland, NUTS 5), the powiat (Administrative re-

gion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> order in Poland, NUTS 4) and the voivodeship (Administrative region of the 1<sup>st</sup> order in Poland, NUTS 2). Since 1999, both poviats and voivodeships also include culture and the protection of cultural goods in their tasks.

Currently, the Act on Commune Self-Government states (after numerous amendments, the last of which came in 2016) that one of the responsibilities of the commune self-government covers activities in the scope of “culture, including commune libraries and other cultural institutions, as well as the protection and care of historical monuments” (Act on Commune Self-Government of 8 March 1990, Dz.U. of 1990 No 16 item 95, p. 7).

A territorial unit may therefore include the following: (a) state cultural institutions which through earmarked subsidies and special-purpose subsidies are primarily funded from the state budget; the subsidies may also come from self-governments' budgets or other sources, e.g. from EU funds or private entities, (b) local government cultural institutions, including regional (voivodeship), poviat, and communal (municipal) institutions, whose subsidies are primarily provided by the budgets of local governments that run them. In view of the above, depending on financial resources and adopted strategic objectives in the context of socio-economic development, each level of the territorial self-government, i.e. voivodeship, poviat, and commune

level, may run its own cultural institutions (Szulborska-Łukaszewicz, 2012). In this respect, cultural institutions are only such institutions that were entered into the register of cultural institutions kept pursuant to Art. 14(1) of the Act on Organising and Conducting Cultural Activities of 25 October 1991 (Dz.U. of 1991 No 114 item 493), in accordance with the rules and templates determined in the Ordinance of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of 26 January 2012 on the manner of running and sharing the register of cultural institutions (Dz.U. of 2012, item 189) which entered into force on 21 May 2012.

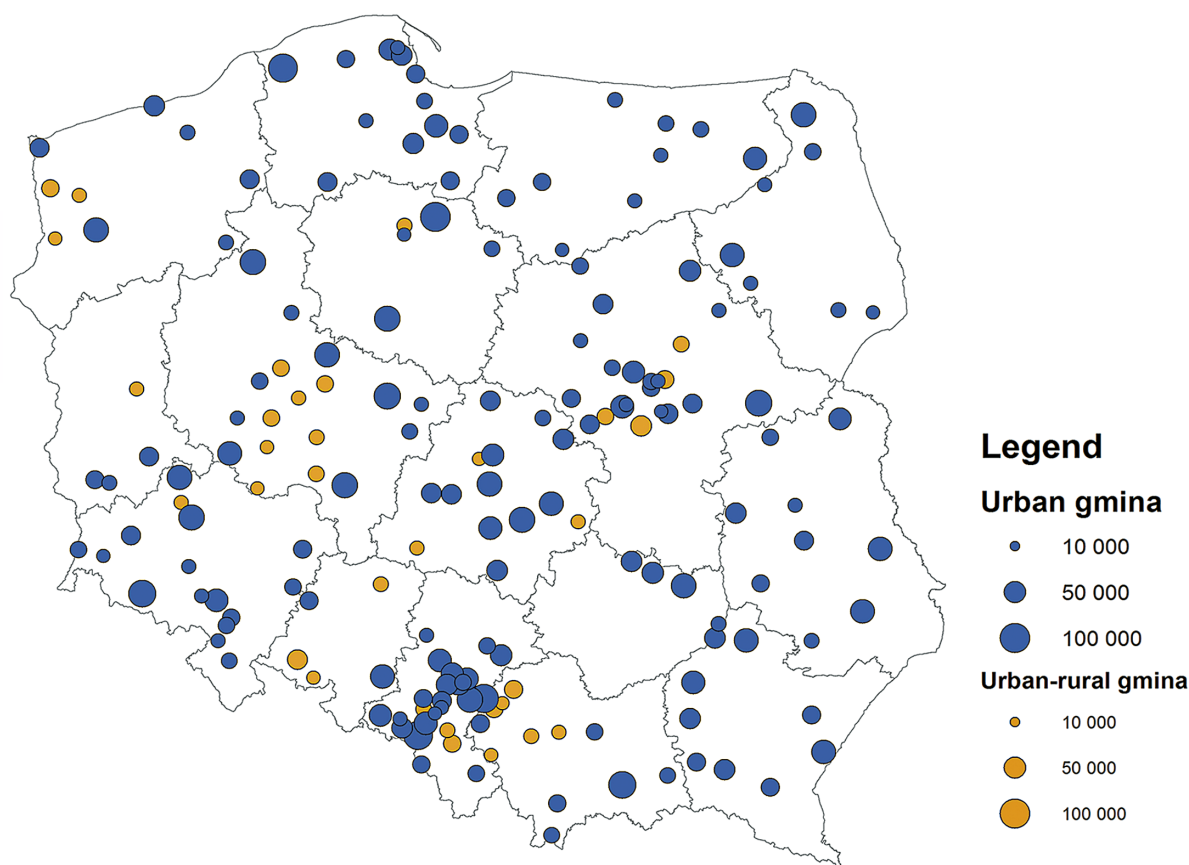
### 3. Materials and methods

The study analyses strategic documents of all 181 cities with between 20,000 and 100,000 residents as at 2016 in Poland (Fig. 1). The authors opted for an analysis of development strategies of each such city. Strategies were downloaded from websites of individual cities or through web pages of the respective Public Information Bulletins. The authors collected and analysed a total of 181 documents containing development strategies, with a particular emphasis placed on chapters dedicated to the cultural sector.

**Table 1.** Key phrases and categories of key phrases related to the cultural sector in the strategies

Tourism development		Tourism development	
<b>Civic society</b>	social capital; development of the local community; integration of the population; activation of inhabitants, companies, NGO; local identity; patriotism		
<b>Quality of life</b>		improving quality of life	
<b>Territorial marketing</b>		image building; city brand building; promotion of the city	
<b>Economic base</b>	growth of competitiveness; gaining competitive advantage; making the city more attractive; attracting new investments; attracting new residents; increasing the city's innovation; building a strong business brand; developing the economic base; economic development; increased employment		
<b>Revival of urban space</b>	renovation of the centre; renewal of a particular object; revitalisation of degraded urban areas; improving the environment		
<b>Cooperation networks</b>	exchange with abroad; cooperation with abroad; cooperation with other cities in the region		
<b>Social problems</b>	reducing crime; reducing social exclusion; inclusion of senior residents in the city life		

Source: Own work based on collected materials



**Fig. 1.** Cities included in the analysis

Source: Authors

The analysis consisted in determining the role attached to the cultural sector in the socio-economic development of a city. Having examined each discussed strategy, the authors listed all contexts containing fragments referring directly to the cultural sector. They took into account expectations towards the development of culture, expressed differently in each of the strategies, as well as descriptions related to the significance of culture in a given city. This resulted in a total of 31 general key phrases related to the cultural sector which were subsequently grouped into 8 main categories created on the basis of an analysis of all strategic documents (see Table 1).

In the next step, the authors used the word cloud method ([www.jasondavies.com/wordcloud](http://www.jasondavies.com/wordcloud)) to determine how frequently the key phrases were used in relation to each of the cities. Key phrases that occurred were ascribed to relevant cities in a given strategy. Subsequently, the authors examined their frequency in the group of all analysed cities.

The next stage was to picture the occurrence of specific categories for all analysed cities on the map of Poland. Finally, on the basis of the results of the study, the authors determined the role ascribed to culture on the basis of strategic documents for each of the examined cities.

#### 4. Research results

The results obtained from the analysis of 181 development strategies indicate that activities in the field of culture are most often perceived chiefly as a factor driving the quality of residents' lives (171 contexts – see tab. 1 and fig. 1), both with reference to the smallest cities (Trzebinia – 20 thousand residents) and the largest ones (Grudziądz – 98 thousand residents) within the discussed group. The strategies primarily indicate that culture coupled with edu-

cational, health or sports and leisure services “as a comprehensive social offer often determines the quality of social capital” (e.g. Development Strategy for the Municipality of Trzebinia for the Years 2014–2020, p. 16). Therefore, it is further assumed that concrete actions within the adopted objectives

(e.g. in Białogard) will aim to increase the quality of residents’ lives through improving conditions for the development of tourism and culture in the commune and protecting the cultural heritage (Development Strategy for the City of Białogard until 2030, pp. 118–119).

**Table. 2.** Contexts in which fragments regarding the cultural sector occur in city development strategies

Quality of life	Civic society	Tourism development	Territorial marketing	Revival	Cooperation networks	Economic base	Social problems
171	131	112	112	93	58	54	23

Source: Own work based on collected materials

In second place, in as many as 131 cities cultural activities are seen as an opportunity to create and strengthen the civic society. Local governments assume that culture makes it possible to develop an adequate quality of human and social capital, activate society, integrate residents and build local identity or local patriotism. Such perception of culture can be best observed in the strategy of the city of Cieszyń which stipulates that it will be possible to provide conditions for the development of human capital as a result of developing cultural activities, among other factors (Development Strategy for the City of Cieszyń for the Years 2010–2020, p. 33). Many cities also point to the need to modernise and regenerate facilities or parts of cities and place cultural activities there. This is to develop and stimulate the civic society (e.g. in Kraśnik, which plans to modernise the Centre for Culture and Promotion to that aim) (Development Strategy for the City of Kraśnik for the Years 2012–2020, p. 93). A chance to integrate residents and build local identity is also seen in the organisation of different types of cultural events. Luboń is a good example of such actions: it has introduced a comprehensive action plan aimed at integrating residents, arising a sense of belonging to the community and building local identity on the basis of the organisation of cultural events (Attachment No. 2 to the Development Strategy for the City of Luboń for the Years 2008–2017, p. 11).

The next most-frequent key phrases relate to the use of culture for the development of tourism (112 indications) and for the management of territorial marketing (112 indications). With regard to the option to use culture to develop tourism in the

city, the authorities primarily indicate the tourist potential found in a rich cultural offer (Lubliniec, Mysłowice, Nowa Sól) or in cultural heritage (e.g. Malbork) (Strategia Lubliniec, Mysłowice, Nowa Sól, Malbork). They also notice how significant the cultural sector is for creating the image of a city or its promotion, and territorial marketing in general. They assume that “the sphere of culture is one of the fields of activities of both local authorities and their subordinate organisational units that has the most powerful impact on the image of a given settlement in a broader geographic scale” (Local Development Strategy for the City of Łuków for the Years 2015–2020, p. 46).

In less than half of the strategies, local governments plan different types of renovation and revitalisation activities to be applied to facilities which are currently dealing in culture or will begin after the overhaul has finished. The planned revival activities are aimed to e.g. create new cultural areas (Orzesze, Płońsk) or modernise existing areas (Prudnik) (Development Strategy for the City of Orzesze for the Years 2012–2020, p. 65; Development Strategy for the Municipality of Płońsk for the Years 2015–2020, pp. 44–46; Development Strategy for the Municipality of Prudnik for the Years 2010–2020, p. 48).

The cultural sector plays a highly important role also in creating and developing broadly-understood cooperation. Cultural activities are indicated in as many as 58 strategies as the basis for the functioning of cities in different cooperation networks combining both different cities or regions in Poland (e.g. Luboń, Malbork, Mielec) or international cooperation networks, chiefly with partner cities (Łomża

Łuków, Radomsko, Sandomierz) (strategies for the following cities: Luboń, Malbork, Mielec, Łomża, Łuków, Radomsko, Sandomierz).



**Fig. 2.** Word cloud illustrating the frequency of key phrases related to culture in individual development strategies (Legend:  $n = 181$ , this word cloud consist of 31 words)

Source: Own work based on collected materials

From the viewpoint of managing a city, an important role, if not a key one, is played by the economic sphere. Cities should therefore use every opportunity to strengthen it. The study shows that 54 cities notice the potential of the cultural sector to increase or develop their competitive advantage, attract investment and residents, improve innovation, build a strong economic brand or increase employment. This is reflected in the provisions of development strategies in e.g. Chełmno, Gostyń, Siedlce, Skawina or Trzebinia (strategies for the following cities: Chełmno, Gostyń, Siedlce, Skawina or Trzebinia).

It should also be noted that the role of the cultural sector was clearly indicated as a remedy to social problems related to social exclusion or crime reduction (e.g. through the inclusion of selected resident groups to cultural activities) in only 23 cases. The strategy for the development of the city of Kłodzko may be a good example: it assumes that representatives of different social groups, e.g. schoolchildren, the elderly, the disabled, and communities which due to strong barriers (e.g. mental, cultural, legal) are outside the mainstream cultural and social life or have restricted access to the same, will be able to participate in and integrate with society as a result of improved access to cultural events and institutions (Development Strategy for the City of Kłodzko 2030, p. 63). These facilitations include introducing a day of free entrance to museums and cultural centres, the development of

educational aids, worksheets and other educational materials for the Museum of the Kłodzko Land, as well as the Stronghold and the Subterranean Route).

During the analysis, the number of contexts in which fragments directly relating to the cultural sector are placed in a given strategy was compared with the population of a given city. However, no dependencies were found in that respect. The correlation coefficient between the number of categories (8) and population confirmed that there was no relation between the two variables; it reached a maximum of 0.17 for the “cooperation network” category.

## 5. Conclusion

When analysed, strategic documents clearly indicate that local authorities in every small city use and are planning to further use different types of cultural activities for the enhancement or development of selected elements included in broadly-understood socio-economic development; however, few small cities notice the wide array of opportunities for making the cultural sector a base for socio-economic development.

The potential of cultural activities for the development of a city is seen primarily in their impact on the quality of residents' lives and the creation of civic society. They also provide an opportunity for the development of tourism, promotion of a city or its revival. Local governments attach much less weight to the significance of culture for the development of cooperation networks or economic benefits. It is least perceived as a factor which can drive the reduction of social problems related e.g. to the social exclusion of specific groups. However, cultural activities are in general described as useful chiefly in the social sphere, and much less so in the economic field. It seems that the characteristics of small cities and their limitations resulting directly and indirectly from their size cause cultural activities to be rarely combined with economic development.

Virtually all strategies planned different types of activities aimed to provide an adequate cultural offer for city inhabitants, but relatively few dwelt on the manner in which culture may promote socio-economic development. This may stem from the



fact that the role of culture in general social development was assumed a priori or that local governments did not recognise culture's potential.

It is necessary to note that the size of a city within the analysed group expressed by its population does not determine whether it has a broader or narrower perception of the role of culture in its strategic documents. It may therefore be assumed that in each case, the potential of the cultural sector is determined by a number of conditions not directly related to city size.

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